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Constructing the Real-Time Border: Frontex, Risk and Dark Imagination

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On the 6 October 2016 at the Kapitan Andreevo Checkpoint on the Bulgarian external border with Turkey, the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG) was launched. The inauguration of the EBCG was accompanied by a presentation of vehicles, equipment and personnel, in addition to a Press Conference fronted by senior EU officials, including the Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos, and the Executive Director of the EBCG, Fabrice Leggeri (Frontex 2016). Comments on the day from senior EU officials celebrated its advent as a rebirth of European unity. Avramopoulos hailed the new agency as ‘turning into reality the principles of shared responsibility and solidarity amongst Member States and the Union’. Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico, speaking in his capacity as President of the European Council, echoed similar sentiments, praising the advent of the EBCG as ‘a practical display of unity among Member States’ that would ‘help us get back to Schengen’ (Frontex 2016). For the political managers of the European Union—overseeing an increasingly fractured, fragile and disputed political entity—the rebirth of Frontex (derived from the French *frontiers extérieures*) as a steering supranational security assemblage is viewed as a prime motor of reinvigorated integration and unity.

Still commonly referred to as Frontex, the revitalised EBCG was a direct response to the refugee crisis of 2015, and most particularly what the European Commission described as the ‘wave through approach’ (European Commission (ECOM) 2016: 2). The reestablishment of internal border controls in eight countries in the Schengen area – Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia, Sweden and Norway – was viewed as endangering the Schengen area, one of the ‘major achievements of integration’

where within the internal area ‘persons and goods can circulate freely’ and where ‘European citizens can exercise their freedoms, and the internal market can prosper and develop’ (ECOM 2016: 2). The European Commission’s ‘Back to Schengen’ roadmap sketched an apocalyptic portrait of the economic and political collapse of the European Union if the new Agency were not instigated. The EBCG proposal therefore envisages achieving supranational unity through security.

What are the security rationalities underlying such a project? In response to this question, this article is an exploration of the security imaginaries, and rationalities, underpinning the vast technocratic and informational infrastructures which lie at the core of Frontex’s mission. The discussion is divided into three parts: security markets, risk analysis and European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR). The first section commences by briefly outlining the recent history of Frontex, before considering the Agency’s role within the political economy of European security. The enchantment within security assemblages for technological solutions and objects is also addressed. The second section considers one of Frontex’s key areas of competence – risk analysis. Risk analysis is an intrinsic aspect of Frontex as an ‘intelligence-led’ agency. Moreover, risk analysis endeavours to anticipate and pre-empt border futures through calculation and projection, and through a range of speculative techniques. Such imagined futures are then drawn back into the present through the conception of the ‘near real-time’ border. This notion of ‘real-time’ is further elaborated in the final section, which examines the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR). Here it is argued that EUROSUR is informed by martial terminology, but more importantly by martial rationalities, that envisage the European borderlands as an expansive battlespace. Moreover, the emphasis upon near ‘real-time’ representation through the layered superimposition of data visualizations conceives the border as an instantaneously unfolding field of vision, amenable to anticipatory and targeted security decisions.

Frontex, Technology and Security Markets

The plan for the EBCG Agency represents another step in the progressive augmentation of Frontex in terms of budget and competencies. Commencing with a budget of €6.5 million and a staff of 45 at its Warsaw Headquarters in 2005, Frontex has incrementally expanded to a current staff of 359 and an

annual budget of €254 million. The Frontex budget is expected to reach €320 million by 2020 (Simantke and Schumann 2016). In tandem with an increased budget and staffing, Frontex in its EBCG incarnation has also acquired a range of new capabilities, including conducting ‘vulnerability assessments’ of Member States operational proficiencies in relation to border control, the ‘right to intervene’ where a member states border control procedures and techniques are judged inadequate, intensified integration of military and civilian actors in the maritime domain, and the capacity to propose return operations on its own initiative (Carrera and den Hertog 2015). While Frontex retains its original role of coordination and analysis, new powers render it increasingly operational and proactive, and envisage a substantially augmented role for the Agency as the centre of coordination, interoperability, policy and action.

Frontex was created by Council Regulation EC2007/2004 on 26 October 2004 with its initial objective being to coordinate operational cooperation between member states to strengthen security at the external borders of the European Union. Nevertheless, cooperation between member states pre-dated its advent, within the Schengen Group from 1985 and following the signing of Schengen Convention in 1995. The Schengen *acquis* was integrated into the European Union legal framework by the Treaty of Amsterdam which came into force in 1999 (Léonard 2009). Further stimulus towards EU cooperation on asylum, migration and internal borders was evident with the adoption of the ‘Tampere Programme’ in the same year, a five-year work programme on internal security that called for common policies on asylum and immigration while advocating ‘consistent control of external borders’ to stem irregular immigration and cross-border crime (Léonard 2010). Immigration had already emerged as a contentious issue in the 1990s, but concern with the control of the European Union’s external border intensified in the early 2000s due to a confluence of factors. Not least of these was EU enlargement, as ten new Member States were scheduled for accession to the EU by 2004, and serious doubt was aired as to whether the new Member States possessed the capacity to control their respective segments of the European Union borderline. The other crucial factor was the terrorist attacks of September 11, which, as in many other jurisdictions, led to the ratcheting up of external border controls (Léonard 2009; more generally see Lyon 2003).

While the idea of a ‘European Border Police’ was keenly discussed during this period (and has not entirely disappeared) concerns over a range of issues including national sovereignty, legal status of border guards in various jurisdictions and linguistic complexity meant the concept receded (Carrera 2010). Frontex consequently emerged as an agency envisaged – at least initially – as steering rather than rowing. Frontex was tasked with the coordination of operational cooperation, including the organisation of joint return operations, promoting ‘solidarity between Member States in the field of external border management’, auditing technical equipment to facilitate the ‘pooling’ of resources, providing training at the European level for border guards and the conduct of risk analysis ‘to tackle identified threats and risks with a view to improving the integrated management of external borders’ (EC 2007/2004).

Frontex is a supranational police enterprise venture that provides technology and expertise, and itself comprises a sizeable proportion of its own target market. Importantly, Frontex was also to ‘follow up on the developments in scientific research relevant for its field’ (EC 2007/2004 (8)). While such a role initially implied only the monitoring of technoscientific security innovation, the role of Frontex in terms of research has become progressively more proactive. Amendments in 2011 envisaged a facilitating role for Frontex, which is to ‘serve as a platform to bring together Europe’s border-control personnel and the world of research and industry to bridge the gap between technological advancement and the needs of border control authorities’ (Frontex 2014a).

In pursuing this aim, Frontex is tasked with ‘proactively’ monitoring *and* contributing to technological developments, in addition to functioning as ‘a link connecting the research and development community with end users and policy makers’ (Frontex 2017a). Moreover, in 2011 Frontex was enabled to lease or purchase technical equipment in its own right (EU 1168/2011), rendering the Agency an end-user in addition to acting as a lynchpin between border control communities and industry (Lemberg-Pedersen 2013). This coordinating role for Frontex has been further cemented by the adoption of the EU Security Industrial Policy, specifically drafted to promote an ‘EU brand’ that would compete with the significant US security industry. Formally announced in 2012, SIP’s intention is to construct a ‘true internal market for security’ in the European Union (Jones 2016). Within this internal market, Frontex occupies multiple

roles as research patron, client and distributor to the border security markets within Member States, and beyond to third countries captivated into European border control assemblages.

The role of Frontex within broader assemblages of border security, and within the political economy of European security, reinforces and perpetuates an adulation of technological solutions amongst the diverse agents of border control. Analysis of the networks of European security professionals suggests that one of the commonalities across the diverse patchwork of actors is an abiding faith in the capacity of technology to produce security; as one survey of the field concluded ‘they all focus on mainly technological solutions to threats to security, as opposed to political or diplomatic channels’ (Bigo, Bonditti & Olsson 2010: 53). The reverence for technology and technological fixes to all manner of problems certainly predates September 11, and is a deeply ingrained current of late modernity (Haggerty & Ericson 2006; Lyon 2003). Post-September 11, however, the allure of the technological fix has been magnified, straddled on one side by commercial interests who have sensed an unprecedented business opportunity, and on the other by security professionals who embrace high technology as a resonant symbol of organizational progress and prestige. Within the European security context, it has been noted that technology performs as an ‘ultra-solution’ (Bigo & Carrera 2004), with processes of Europeanization – propelled within the framework of the Area of Freedom, Justice and Security (AFSJ) – cultivating the perspective that ‘technology is the most plausible tool to face any imagined insecurity’ (Guild, Carrera & Balzacq 2008: 4).

Risk, Threat and Imagination

Frontex proclaims that risk analysis, in terms of both process and development, is ‘the starting point for all Frontex activities’, from high-level strategic decision-making to the planning and implementation of operations (Frontex 2017b). Developing a Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model (CIRAM) and supplying ‘tailored risk analyses’ was a mandated and central task of Frontex from its inception (EC 2007/2004). The privileged position of risk analysis within the Agency informs the broader objective of Frontex being ‘intelligence-led’. The term ‘intelligence-led’ has its origins in the domestic context of state policing. Initially it was a proposal in the early 1990s by Kent Police to use police data on

known offenders and their associates to prevent crime by disrupting suspected criminal networks (Tilley 2008). The drift of the term into border control underlines the orientation of Frontex as an agency of enforcement, control and expulsion—an orientation which remains evident, and which coexists and intertwines with the Agency's self-presentation as being driven by humanitarian goals of saving lives at sea and mitigating migrant exploitation through focussing on criminal involvement in irregular migrant passage (Pallister-Wilkins 2015).

The prioritizing of risk analysis in fashioning Frontex as an 'intelligence-led' security agency leads to a distinct orientation towards the future. As Ulrich Beck (1992) has suggested, risk calculations posit the 'not-yet-event as stimulus to action' and evidence that 'the centre of risk consciousness lies not in the present but in the future' (1992: 34). Beck further asserts that in risk societies: 'the past loses the power to determine the present. Its place is taken by the future, thus something non-existent, invented, fictive as the "cause" of current experience and action' (1992: 34). Similarly, Giddens argues risk calculus underpins the desire for the 'colonization of the future' (1991: 111) within late modern societies confronted by escalating complexity and alienation. Recent critique suggests that risk, which principally directs calculation towards probable futures in the mode of forecasting, is increasingly intermingled, and frequently superseded by, 'premediation' (Grusin 2004); ventures towards the imaginative, and often improbable, construction of possible futures to mobilize action *in the present* (Author 2016). While certainly possessing a longer historical trajectory, a valence towards pre-emptive police actions propelled by manifold speculative projections reflects a contemporary security consensus—that the attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001 could have been interdicted were it not for a 'failure of imagination'. What were viewed as calcified, isolated and rigidly hierarchical security bureaucracies, dominated by conventional risk modelling, were implored to extend their creative capacities by envisaging worst-case *possible* (even if implausible) scenarios (O'Malley & Bougen 2008). As De Goede suggests, exercises in catastrophic imaginings are not really about the future at all. Rather they are 'about enabling action in the present by visualizing and drawing upon multiple imagined futures' (2008: 159).

The imperative to wrench imagined futures into the present where they can act as the rationale for action was clearly articulated in an intriguing report commissioned by the Frontex Risk Analysis Unit in 2011. The subsequent document—produced by Liron Systems and entitled *Futures of Borders*—promoted the contemplation of future scenarios ranging from ‘probable futures’ to ‘wild cards’, advising that ‘planning cannot be based on specific predictions of trends or “likely” developments. With current knowledge, the future will always be unpredictable’ (Liron Systems Ltd 2011, p. iii). Strongly advocating the role of imagination in European border control, the report advised both the active engagement of future scenarios and the training of border guards in ‘future thinking’. The general argument of the report was best captured by the inclusion of a quotation from management guru Peter Drucker; suggesting that: ‘the best way to predict the future—is to create it’ (Liron Systems Ltd. 2011, p. 1). The current CIRAM guidelines would suggest that Frontex regarded the Liron Systems report, and Drucker’s counsel, with considerable seriousness.

Risk within the CIRAM guidelines is defined as a function of threat, vulnerability and impact. Broken down further ‘threats’ are forces or pressures acting upon the external border to be evaluated in terms of ‘magnitude and likelihood’; ‘vulnerability’ refers to the capacity of border control systems to mitigate the threat; while ‘impact’ refers to potential consequences. Risk calculus and the imperative of Frontex to be ‘intelligence-led’ are mobilized in setting priorities, the formulation of counter-measures and ‘designating operational targets’ (Frontex 2012, 7). The labour of scanning and analysing for risk and threat is driven by a vast range of data sources. At the national level, supranational databases including the Visa Information System (VIS), Schengen Information System and Eurodac are combined with a wide range of data including (amongst other sources) police and incident records, bank account records, field interviews, baggage searches, driver’s licence records, telephone accounts and property ownership. At the European level, national analysis from Member States is combined with more ‘sensitive’ data, including data from Joint Operations, raw data from Member States (viewed as more useful than processed data as Member States will not have taken out ‘any of the useful information’), information on and from third countries, and data from national security agencies that may rely on

electronic interception or satellite imagery, including information from the EU Satellite Centre (Frontex 2012, 53-54).

The Frontex Risk Analysis Centre in Warsaw emerges as an exemplar of what Bruno Latour has termed ‘centres of calculation’—sites where ‘literal and not simply metaphorical *calculations* are made possible by the mathematical or at least arithmetic format of the documents being brought back and forth’ (2005: 181). Data inputs from a diverse range of sources are processed engaging a range of analytical tools, then fed back out through border security assemblages where they inform both policy and action. There are a range of assessment techniques, and analysts are encouraged to use a ‘layered approach’ combining several methodologies. These comprise field-based techniques to collect raw data, structured and semi-structured interviews, surveys and empirical methods based upon historical data sets. However, the guidelines caution that conventional modes of analysis more prove inadequate for predicting ‘first-time, unexpected or rare scenarios’. Analysts are therefore advised to blend more conventional methods of analysis with ‘imagination-based techniques’ (Frontex 2012, 34).

Frontex risk analysis relies upon numerous imagination-based techniques; including structured brainstorming, multiple scenario generation, the structured what-if technique (SWIFT), high impact/low probability analysis (HI/LP). There are also ‘reframing devices’ such as devil’s advocacy and red hat analysis that aim to challenge perspectives. In the case of red hat analysis, analysts are implored to imagine themselves as targets, and to contemplate ‘how the target is most likely to think behave and respond’ (Frontex 2012, 44). The suite of imagination techniques seeks to energise ‘outside-the-box thinking’ and is particularly recommended for ‘highly ambiguous situations’ where data is lacking and the chance of unexpected developments is regarded as significant. Structured brainstorming involves group discussion that emphasizes imagination and the cross-pollination of ideas in relation to a predetermined problem, and is regarded as useful in detecting hitherto unconceived risks and devising mitigating measures in relation to ‘original and untested scenarios’ (Frontex 2012, 39). Similarly, multiple scenario generation is used to construct models of ‘how the future might turn out’. Rather than a single future, however, the technique reflects upon multiple contingent futures. Multiple scenario

generation is viewed as well-suited to ‘anticipating surprise developments and generating field requirements’ in situations where there is ‘little concrete information or highly ambiguous or uncertain threats’. The future is thus envisaged as multiple, wildly contingent and severed from historical continuity, as the technique ‘does not consider historical data and past observations to necessarily remain valid at a future point of time’, focusing rather upon ‘paradigm shifts and turning points’ (Frontex 2012, 40).

The CIRAM guidelines concede that imagination techniques are constrained by the ‘inherent speculation involved’ and the likelihood of ‘producing unrealistic scenarios’. Nevertheless, they are promoted as invaluable research methodologies at both the supranational and national level (Frontex 2012, 41). Frontex risk analysis products differ markedly from the actuarial practices of insurance outlined by Ewald (1991). Risk in the mode of insurance is calculable – as Ewald suggests it must be possible to compute its probability (1991, 202). Additionally, insurance risk is collective; while an accident may appear as an individual misfortune its frequency can be statistically charted across the population, facilitating probabilistic calculation and rational distribution. Self-evidently—efforts to render catastrophic events insurable notwithstanding (see Ericson and Doyle 2004)—the probabilistic calculus of risk within this context also relies upon continuities between past, present and future. In contrast, the later twentieth century and early twenty-first century has witnessed catastrophic events such as terrorist attacks and nuclear accidents whose materialization and impacts are largely incalculable, uninsurable and unknowable. Moreover, science and technology—which in the earlier twentieth century extended the promise of taming contingency—serves only to generate yet further opaquely incalculable risks and threats (Beck 2009).

In the context of overwhelming uncertainty, Ewald (2002) argues that the precautionary principle has emerged as a new rationality of institutional decision making. The precautionary principle, in Ewald’s account, ‘invites one to anticipate what one does not yet know, to take into account doubtful hypotheses and simple suspicions’ (2002: 288). As the range of dark imaginings of catastrophe and crisis is potentially infinite, such propositions inherently evade conventional probabilistic risk calculus. The principle of precaution in many domains cautions against risk-taking. Conversely, in the domain of

security, the precautionary principle is more likely to function as a stimulus to pre-emptive action aimed at extinguishing threats prior to their actualisation (Author XXXX). In the case of Frontex and its integration of imagination-based risk assessment techniques, the rationalities of precaution and pre-emption fuse with a further rationality—that of preparedness. Preparedness does not seek to avoid catastrophic scenarios – rather it mobilizes catastrophic futures to develop organizational responses to them (Lakoff 2007). Threats consequently become ‘vulnerabilities’ to be mitigated through planning, coordination and enactment. Moreover, preparedness does not envisage singular crises or catastrophic events, but a multitude of threatening futures to be drawn into the present. Preparedness thus encourages a continuous reflexive search for vulnerabilities in wait for the just-about-becoming future which has already been simulated. The imagination-based risk analysis techniques of Frontex are embedded in this rationality of preparedness. The speculative origins of these dark imaginings, however, are obscured in multiple data flows, and by the shimmer of calculative precision encasing Frontex’s risk products. These imaginaries also form the life-blood of Frontex’s flagship project: the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR).

EUROSUR: The Martial Rationalities of Real-Time

The EUROSUR (European Border Surveillance System) is, to say the least, ambitious. Conceptually it is nothing less than a security colossus. Envisaged as a ‘system of systems’ the principal aim of EUROSUR is to enhance ‘situational awareness’ and the flexibility and operational speed of border control operations. Described as an ‘information-exchange network’, the stated mission of the EUROSUR project is to facilitate rapid reactions to emerging threats of cross-border crime and irregular migration, while simultaneously pursuing the objective of ‘saving lives at sea’ (Rijpma and Vermeulen 2015). The EUROSUR project – as a system of systems – endeavours to suture together a beguilingly complex surveillance architecture ranging from drones, naval vessels and satellite surveillance and sensor systems through to networking software dispersed across participating nation-states (Simantke

and Schuman 2016). The ‘backbone’ of the system is a network of National Coordination Centres (NCCs) which, under the EUROSUR regulation (EU 1052/2013), each Member State is obligated to establish. NCCs coordinate border security and other enforcement and regulatory bodies within individual Member States. NCCs are also obligated to compile all relevant data and analyse and interpret it through the risk analysis tools outlined in the CIRAM guidelines (Frontex 2012). The National Situation Picture is compiled from national border surveillance systems, stationary and mobile sensors, border patrols and missions, local or regional coordination centres, other ‘relevant national authorities and systems’, Frontex, the NCCs of other Member States, third countries, ship reporting systems, relevant European and international organizations, and ‘any other sources’ (EU 1052/2013, Art. 9, 1-2).

The NSP transmits data in ‘near real-time’ to Eurosur Fusion Services – the centre of calculation which combines and augments the NSPs into the European Situational Picture (ESP) and the Common Pre-Frontier Intelligence Picture (CPIP), which focuses upon areas beyond the Schengen Area and EU borders (Frontex 2017c). In addition to the compilation and analysis of data to construct the ESP and CPIP, Eurosur Fusion Services also distributes data to the NCCs from satellite and surveillance systems operating at the European Level in cooperation with the European Maritime Safety Agency and the EU Satellite Centre. Eurosur Fusion Services also provides access to ‘state of the art technologies’ providing NCCs with automated vessel tracking and detection capabilities, software to undertake ‘complex calculations for detecting anomalies’ in addition to ‘precise weather and oceanographic forecasts (Frontex 2017c). The three ‘pictures’ are assembled through the compilation of data in three layers: an events layer, an operational layer and an analysis layer (EU 1052/2013).

Each of these layers is itself constituted from multiple sub-layers. The events layer includes sub-layers of unauthorized border crossings, cross-border crime, crisis situations and ‘unidentified or suspect’ vehicles, vessels and persons near at or near Member States borders. The operational layer is an inventory on assets, including military assets ‘assisting in a law enforcement mission’ and data relating to the position, status and type of assets and the agencies involved. A further sub-layer consists of

environmental data including terrain and weather conditions at external borders. The analytical layer is comprised of an information sub-layer containing key developments and indicators, an analytical sub-layer including reports and risk rating trends, an intelligence sub-layer of analysed data for the attribution of impact levels at external border sections and an imagery and geo-data sub-layer including reference imagery, background maps, Earth observation imagery, change detection, geo-referenced data and external border permeability maps (EU 1052/2013, Art. 9, 1-7).

The layered data visualisations of national situation pictures, combined with the risk analysis products produced by Frontex, are envisaged as creating a near-real-time representation of the border. In turn these data flows, which move horizontally and vertically through EUROSURs informational architecture, inform risk categorization and the determination of 'threat level' at the border into segments of low, medium and high impact (EU 1052/2013, Art. 15, 1-3). EUROSUR's layered data visualisations are therefore intended to crystallize disparate data fragments into a moving cartographic totality transmitted to monitors in the dispersed NCCs of the EUROSUR assemblage. Nevertheless, despite the intricate complexity of their layered composition, EUROSUR's data visualisations are distillations and representations, not of a tangible natural reality, but of particular security logics and operations of state (and supra-state) power. As James C. Scott suggests, the potency of cartographic representation resides 'not in the map...but rather in the power possessed by those who deploy the perspective of that particular map' (1998: 87). Moreover the 'near-real-time' visualisations cleanse the projections and imaginings of Frontex risk analysis already discussed of their speculative birth. 'Real-time' feeds transmitted to control room monitors exile their own speculative origins, imbuing them with the appearance of objective and neutral facticity. The temporal contraction between incident and perception also draws selective and speculative analysis closer to the instant of action, to the potential point where visualised quantifications actively construct the reality they monitor. As Mackenzie suggests: 'Real time attempts to collapse the intervals between event and its reception, so that the event is structured by its processing' (2002: 168).

The visualisations of EUROSUR accrue their semblance of veracity from the persistent appeal that information be transmitted in ‘near-real-time’. The notion of ‘real-time’ is worth examining further, as scholars in a range of disciplines are examining how ‘real-time’ operates in relation to the ‘real-time web’ and in relation to financial markets through informational practices such as high frequency trading (see for example Berry 2011). Moreover, it is via the concept of ‘real-time’ that evident affinities between the circuits of security and the circuits of capital emerge. The tendency towards the compression of time in capitalism was famously noted by Marx in the *Grundrisse*, where he observed that:

The more developed the capital...the more extensive the market over which it circulates...the more does it strive simultaneously for an even greater extension of the market and for greater annihilation of space by time (1973: 539)

The experience of ‘time-space compression’ (Harvey 1990) has intensified with technological innovation, most evident in computational time reduced to nanoseconds. Sociologist of time Helga Nowotny argues that the future is compressing into the present, as processes of innovation, repetition and discarding accelerate. The future, Nowotny (1994) argues, is disappearing in favour of an ‘extended present’. Urbanist Paul Virilio—who postulates speed and the erasure of space in the pursuit of dominance as the key motor of temporal and social transformation (2006)—has similarly argued that history ‘is disappearing in favour of the instant’ and that duration is also evaporating ‘in favour of instantaneousness’ (Virilio & Lotringer 2008: 60). Moreover, the frenetic momentum produced by the dynamic interplay between speed and military rationalities in Virilio’s account (2006), are evident in the EUROSUR project—and in recent military theorizations.

The fantastical conception of the EUROSUR project, the speculative elements of Frontex risk analysis, and the Agency’s entrancement with technology and information, betray palpable resemblances to recent US military theories. The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) – strongly influenced by the futurist writings of Alvin and Heidi Toffler in *The Third Wave* and *War and Anti-War* – envisages the extensive engagement of surveillance and information technologies, in tandem with precision weapons,

to achieve ‘full-spectrum superiority’ over the operational theatre of military action (Bousquet 2009: 216-217; see also Rasmussen 2006). ‘Full-spectrum superiority’ is defined as ‘the cumulative effect of dominance in the air, land, maritime, and space domains, electromagnetic spectrum, and information environment’ that facilitates the conduct of military operations ‘without effective opposition or prohibitive interference’ (DOD 2017: 97). The concept of ‘network-centric warfare’—which extends from the precepts of RMA—absorbs notions of flexibility, speed and complexity into military infrastructures, and draws upon concepts from economic and business management that imagine rapid interactions between informational nodes. ‘Value’ is then produced through the substance, integrity and tempo of data circulating between nodes of the network. The closer information gravitates towards complete precision, relevance and instantaneous transmission and reception, the closer to full-spectrum superiority the military network advances (Bousquet 2009: 220).

The mimesis of conceptions such as network-centric warfare by Frontex and the EUROSUR project might initially invite discussion of the ‘militarization’ of European border control. This notion is accurate to the extent that state militaries do actively participate operationally in the EUROSUR network. However, discussion of ‘militarization’ may also obscure the floating drift across domains of economy, production and security of martial logics that are deeply imbricated with the flows of capital and its processes of primitive accumulation. Additionally, as Neocleous argues, a concentration upon the idea of a novel fusion and entangling of war and police power ignores that they have historically been conterminous, *and* that both processes operate conjointly as state power to safeguard ‘those nebulous targets of bourgeois desire: security, order and accumulation’ (2014: 13). As Andersson (2014) demonstrates, the very language of Frontex melds the terminologies of war with those of business. Frontex delivers ‘a wide range of analytical products’ and adopts a ‘service orientated approach’ (EC 2015: 18). The language of business enterprise coexists with the deployment of military jargon, with the external border described as the ‘operational theatre’ (Andersson 2014: 76). ‘Situational awareness’—defined in the Eurosur Regulation as ‘the ability to monitor, detect, identify, track and understand illegal cross-border activities in order to find reasoned grounds for reaction measures’ (EU 1052/2013, Art. 1, b)—has its origins in aerial combat dating back to the First World War. Emerging

in the 1980s the desire for enhanced ‘situational awareness’ has now spread across domains from civil aviation to power and chemical plant surveillance and, importantly, to border control (Walters 2016). This hybrid fusion of military and business discourse reflects the binary image Frontex has of itself — as a supplier of risk products and technological solutions on the one hand, and as a rapid deployment force to combat imminent threats on the other (Andersson 2014: 77).

Frontex’s dualistic organisational self-understanding is in fact unsurprising. The RMA and conceptions of network-centric warfare were themselves reflective of efforts to bring the ‘information revolution’ transforming business and management into the military sphere (Massumi 2015: 94). The aspiration of flexible and networked processes of production, that satiate consumer desires at the instant of their emergence, is mirrored in the imaginary of rapid enforcement actions extinguishing threats prior to their materialisation. Confronted with the complexities of a perpetually accelerating global economy and its manifold uncertainties and unknowns, moreover, organisations across domains endeavour to mould their structures in the economy’s image. The embrace of uncertainty and complexity is evident in military theories, that envisage continuous feedback and transmission of data through multiple horizontal and vertical vectors, informing ‘real-time’ reaction to emergent phenomenon and threats. Complex military organisations are also envisaged as intricate self-correcting ecological systems with an innate capacity to evolve. Rather than hierarchical systems of command and control, these baroque military structures are aimed at allowing nodes at any position within the system – high or low, front or back – to act in and on the instant. As Massumi suggests:

Considering that time is now of the essence of war, the evolutionary feedback must operate in as close to real time as possible, the up and down feedback occurring with such lightning speed as to make the military hierarchy the topological equivalent of the network (2015: 96).

The augmented intelligence of real-time, fuelled by data streams, does not aspire to comprehensive knowledge or reflective consideration of the battlespace. Rather it enables movement in the ‘blinks’ – the intervals where information is delayed and/or incomplete. In such a scenario – where lightspeed information flows are imagined as reaching all points of the network in near-real-time – when the eyes

open, they open onto a collective consciousness. This collective consciousness, Massumi suggests, is ‘in all immediacy, an effective, and effectively collective, will to fight’ (2015: 93). It is these martial rationalities which infuse the security imaginary of the EUROSUR project, and which inform its fixation on the notion of ‘near-real-time’.

The security logics of EUROSUR are also analogous with the rationalities of drone surveillance adumbrated by philosopher Grégoire Chamayou. Chamayou outlines several major principles constituting the ‘revolution in sighting’ (2015: 38) presaged by the drone. These include; the principle of persistent surveillance or permanent watch; the principle of a totalization of perspective or a synoptic viewing; the principle of creating an archive or film of everyone’s life; the principle of data fusion; the principle of the schematization of forms of life; and the principle of the detection of anomalies and preemptive anticipation (Chamayou 2015: 38-43). As with the drone stare, the surveillance saturated topology of the EUROSUR project attempts to construct a scaled-down eye of God—an ever-present technologically-augmented gaze enveloping the European land mass, its maritime environments, and the borderlands at its edges. EUROSUR and the NCCs are mandated to operate twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (EU 1052/2013, Art. 5, 4), perpetually monitoring, reporting and updating.

The ‘near-real-time’ visualizations are also devices for totalized perspectives, which simultaneously project a wide-angle environmental representation complemented by intricate and layered levels of detail which may be zoomed-in upon with pinpoint accuracy. As such this reflects security aspirations for finely calibrated security decisions within fields of complexity, an imaginary Valverde and Mopas (2004) have termed ‘targeted governance’. Through perpetual data generation and the integration of extant databases into the EUROSUR system, the control fantasy of a complete archive of border movements and those moving around, behind and across them is also manifest. The principle of data fusion is also a defining characteristic of the EUROSUR design, as it seeks to fabricate an informatized panoply from the disparate systems it envelops at national and regional level. The cartographic visualisations also facilitate what Chamayou terms ‘the schematization of forms of life’ (2015: 42) – multi-dimensional representations that chart lives in motion, and which seek to isolate and act upon activity categorised as abnormal in relation to the norm. The continuous EUROSUR stare is predicated

on the detection of anomalies, which serve as an incitement to anticipatory intervention. These principles – in tandem with the vision of the ‘near-real-time’ – comprise Frontex and EUROSUR’s system of martial rationalities.

The vision of the near-real-time border as an instantaneous Europe-wide transmission surging through the informational nervous system of EUROSUR is, nevertheless, a security chimera. The ‘near-real-time’ of transmission and visualisation of the system is a mediated ‘real-time’. ‘Real-time’, as Thomas (2014) notes in relation to pandemic tracking, is a pastiche of multiple temporalities that range across past, present and future. EUROSUR’s intricately layered situational pictures fuse archival data, live tracking and risk projections into a potpourri of time-sequences; fused to construct the situational picture of the near-real-time border. Through these visualisations, the epistemological frailty evident in the imagination-based techniques of Frontex risk analysis assume the appearance of an indubitable reality in the present. The coming crisis of border security is perpetually being constructed, a process which drags it into the immediate moment, where it emerges as a problem of security to be acted upon in the here and now.

Conclusion: Phantasms and Rationalities of Security

That the operational realities of a security imaginary as ornate as that conjured within Frontex, and culminating in the EUROSUR project, does not accord with its fantastic conception is hardly surprising. Many agents within European border control assemblages have not heard of EUROSUR, or else do not engage with it – either due to technological lag or because they fail to see any utility in its visualisations (Simantke and Schumann 2016). The dream of data information transferred vertically and horizontally across network actors also flounders as security actors jealously guard information that is the font of their prestige and power (Andersson 2014: 91). Nevertheless, the fact that this grand ‘system of systems’ does not work according to the dreams of its designers does not mean the rationalities underpinning it should be dismissed as fantasy. In drawing a distinction between apparatuses of discipline and those of security, Foucault noted that discipline is centripetal; that it circumscribes a space and ‘concentrates, focuses and encloses’. The apparatuses of security, conversely, ‘have the constant tendency to expand; they are centrifugal’ (Foucault 2007: 44-45). Foucault’s account of the apparatuses of security was

eerily reflected in the words of EUROSUR policy chief, Oliver Seiffarth, in a plenary discussion at the European Day for Border Guards in 2014. Noting that the EUROSUR project was a work in progress and that ‘not everything will be up and running from day one’, Seiffarth went on to articulate the underlying logic of EUROSUR, commenting that it was ‘conceived as a system, as a project, as a process that will never stop’ (EDBG 2014). Moreover, for the champions of EUROSUR, the system itself it infallible, floundering only in the face of human error or insufficient data. The press release for the launch of EUROSUR concluded by stating that; ‘how it is used, and what its future benefits will be, depend on the systems users, not on the system itself’ (Frontex 2014). Understanding the martial rationalities underpinning such vast security projects is an important prelude to thinking through how such dystopian security imaginaries might be challenged.

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